

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Economy Cabinets, Inc.

Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Economy Cabinets, Inc., Moves Business Forward with Georgia Tech Assistance

Client Profile:

Economy Cabinets, Inc., founded in 1994, manufactures wholesale birch, oak, maple and poplar cabinets. The family-owned business employs 12 people at its facility in White, Georgia.

Situation:

Economy Cabinets was experiencing rapid growth and the company's manager, Jonathan White, wanted assistance implementing Lean management principles to identify and eliminate waste. To address this challenge, White sought the counsel of Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute (EII), a NIST MEP network affiliate.

Solution:

EII's regional manager, David Apple, developed a plant layout for both Economy Cabinets' current and future facilities, an activity that pointed out opportunities for improving efficiency. By timing all of the individual steps in making cabinets, he identified a time spike on gluing and sanding doors. "All of the individual processes were taking one or two minutes, and when we got to the putty and sanding, the time required was over seven minutes," White recalled. "We knew we had to solve that, so I found a new cutting tool that eliminated the need for putty and sanding. It cut that final step down to less than two minutes."

White attended Georgia Tech's Lean boot camp, a four-day class that teaches participants how Lean impacts profit, lead-time, inventory, quality and customer service. By the end of the course, White was able to map both current and future value streams, identify appropriate techniques for improvement, develop a Lean strategy and plan the application of specific lean techniques. The first area he tackled was 5S, a philosophy of organizing and managing the workspace with the intent to improve efficiency and safety. White implemented visual cues to assist with re-ordering the company's saw blades. Prior to implementing this tool, White would work directly with the person sharpening his saw blades, guessing which machines needed new blades and distributing them to the floor himself. Now, the vendor visits a tool board on which the blades needing to be sharpened are hung by employees, allowing him to service the entire shop himself. "Now, the operator always has a sharp blade available when it's needed; it eliminates searching for a blade he doesn't have, and it eliminates buying unneeded, new blades," said White.

Economy Cabinets has also received assistance from EII's e2e Works, a program that helps entrepreneurs in the state of Georgia. Andy Helm, an entrepreneur outreach specialist with e2e Works, continues to assist Economy Cabinets by providing expertise in business management practices, technical assistance and access to a variety of industry-specific resources. "The efficiencies that White has gotten through the plant have allowed him to meet delivery times that his competitors can't, and that's a huge competitive advantage in this industry," said Helm.

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Results:

- * Increased sales by 10 percent.
- * Increased productivity by 20 percent.
- * Reduced inventory by 15 percent.

Testimonial:

"We're grateful to Andy and David and Georgia Tech for the impact they've made on the company."
Jonathan White, Manager